



# CHELAN-DOUGLAS HEALTH DISTRICT

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## REUSE OF EXISTING SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Until the early 1980's, a septic system was regarded as a temporary means of sewage disposal, to be abandoned as soon as public sewers were extended into the neighborhood. But by the 1980's, it became apparent that grants for public sewer extensions would not be as plentiful as before.

Consequently, greater efforts were made to discover better ways of designing and building septic systems so they would last longer without becoming a nuisance or a danger to public health. As a result, there are dramatic differences between the systems that are being built today, and those that were installed only a few years ago.

Existing systems must be upgraded when they fail, or when there is a change in the use of the property that would increase the load on the system, or physically encroach upon it. Existing systems that were approved, installed, and operated in accordance with requirements in effect at the time they were installed are still considered acceptable under some circumstances. **YOU may obtain a permit to use the existing system to serve a new or remodeled structure where:**

1. The system shows no signs of failure.
2. The type of use (residential) and the amount of use (number of bedrooms) will remain consistent with the standards and regulations in effect at the time of its construction.
3. The project will not physically encroach upon the system. Drainfields must remain at least 10 feet from buildings, and septic tanks at least 5 feet. Neither may be placed below driveways or other traffic areas, or areas subject to cuts or fills, or within 10 feet of water lines.
4. The project will not eliminate the property's ability to accommodate the installation of a replacement system when, as is likely, the old system fails someday in the future. The replacement system must meet current standards.

Where these conditions are not present, you will need to apply for a permit to construct a new system meeting current standards. A site evaluation (with test holes) may be necessary to determine the design and location of the new system.

Please remember that older system designs are less likely to provide as many years of service as the newer designs. And, even if design changes were not a factor, sewer systems, like everything else, become less reliable with age. A permit to reuse an existing system is nothing more than permission to use whatever might be left of this system's service life.

## Before You Apply:

If your project requires a building permit for a structure in the unsewered area, you will also need to apply to the Health District for a permit to either connect to the existing septic system or construct a new one. It is not always obvious which is appropriate. Because of the difference in fees, you should consider the following before you submit your application:



### **Find out if the existing septic system was installed under a Health District Permit.**

Call or stop by our office with the legal description of the property. The District has few records on installations done prior to the 1970's. But if we can locate one, it will probably be the best source for the information you need to describe and assess your system.

Sometimes a permit cannot be found, or perhaps the old permit documents don't contain enough useful information regarding the system's size, location and soil conditions. That information must then be gathered by a Field Evaluation. This evaluation is most often performed by the Health District for a fee. Professional Engineers may also perform this service and submit their findings to the Health District. In the event that the existing system turns out not to be approvable, the information gathered during the field evaluation can be used to prepare an application for a permit to construct a new system.



### **Are you increasing the number of bedrooms in your house above the number shown on the original permit? Or, is your project a non-residential or commercial establishment such as a day care, beauty parlor, store, restaurant, etc.?**

If the answer is "yes", then it is likely that a new system will be required. You will need to go through the regular permitting process for a new installation meeting today's standards. This is a two-step process involving a Site Evaluation (or the Field Evaluation described above), and a Permit Application.



### **Will the changes to your house or other structure bring it within 10 feet of your drainfield or replacement area, or within 5 feet of your septic tank?**

If the answer is "yes", you will need to redesign your project to avoid encroaching on the existing system or the replacement area.

If that is not possible, you will need to replace your system with one meeting today's standards. -